

first came to India in 2002, a bewildered 20-year-old college student leaving the United States for the first time, to take up an editorial internship in Kochi, Kerala. My reasons were not very romantic. The main motivation stemmed from India's English media. India was one of the few places in Asia I could work as a journalist without knowing a local language.

My school, the Evergreen State College in Washington state, had a liberal policy on internships, and I received a quarter year's worth of academic credit and returned home to northern California in four months. But India, as it so often does to us restless souls from the West, got under my skin. After finishing my undergraduate degree in journalism, I came back to work as a journalist in New Delhi, married an Indian, and took private lessons in Hindi. Thus, I became an unofficial student in all things South Asia without having ever stepped into a class on the subject.

But this is set to change soon. And much of the thanks for it are due to SPAN.

My husband and I settled in Washington, D.C. in 2007, and while helping him research a story for SPAN, I met Ambassador Karl Inderfurth, a former assistant secretary of state for South Asian affairs, who is now in charge of the graduate program in international affairs at The George Washington University (<http://www.gwu.edu/index.cfm>). He told me about the cooperation agreement the university had signed with Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, allowing for both faculty and student exchanges.

Inderfurth also told me that though some faculty from India had come to Washington to teach, no student from the Elliott School of International Affairs had yet taken advantage of the opportunity to go to Jawaharlal Nehru University. I knew I had to be that first student.

Graduate school is not an automatic next step in the United States after undergraduate studies, as it often is in India. It's a big investment (usually ranging from \$10,000 to more than \$30,000 a year in tuition) and it's a big decision. I had long thought of going to graduate school, and I even took my Graduate Record Examination while living in India, but had no idea where and when I wanted to go.

Luckily, life sometimes gives you a helping hand. The George Washington University's international affairs program is well-respected, and has the advantage of being

An American Chooses Graduate School Semester in India

By ERICA LEE NELSON

U.S. and Indian universities are moving forward creatively with new ways to exchange students, faculty, research and resources. In another first, this American is starting graduate school in Washington, D.C. and completing her degree in New Delhi.

located in the U.S. capital. Combined with study at one of the most respected schools in India, it was too good to pass up.

Having worked as a journalist since I was a teenager, I am ready to branch out and try something new. My goal is to find a job where I can work to bring the two countries closer together.

Just as a graduate degree from The George Washington University is a huge boost on my résumé in the United States, I believe Jawaharlal Nehru University will provide an important global perspective for my studies and increase my legitimacy as an American with a deep understanding of South Asia. I also plan to complete a research project with the help of its resources and faculty.

People called me crazy when I just applied to one graduate school. But I knew that The George Washington University had everything I was looking for, and I wasn't willing to settle for anything less. The gamble paid off: I was accepted and began classes toward my degree in international affairs on September 2.

Planning for study abroad is complicated. The George Washington University's international exchange student program

works like many others: It will accept up to 10 academic credits from a foreign university with which it has entered into a partnership. (A total of 40 credits are needed to earn a graduate degree). Thus, I have to schedule my studies carefully to make sure I complete all required core courses before I leave for India during my last semester in graduate school.

During the coming year, I will work to choose a research paper topic, apply for study abroad scholarships, and choose my classes for Jawaharlal Nehru University. I'll also have to file an application for official acceptance as a foreign student at the university, and arrange my own housing in New Delhi.

If all goes well, I'll be coming to India in 2010, but this time as a confident 29-year-old graduate student, returning to a country filled with family and friends. I won't be dependent on just English, and instead will be working to perfect my Hindi. My reasons for arrival are more varied now, but definitely more romantic. I simply love India, and cannot wait to return.

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